

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

RECORD OF DECISION

Comprehensive Management Plan
Final Environmental Impact Statement

Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail
Alabama

INTRODUCTION

The Department of the Interior, National Park Service (NPS), has prepared this Record of Decision (ROD) on the *Comprehensive Management Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement* (CMP/EIS) for the Selma to Montgomery National Historic Trail (the “Trail”) in Alabama. This ROD is a statement of the decision made, the background of the project, other alternatives considered, the basis for the decision, the environmentally preferable alternative, and public involvement in the decision-making process.

The CMP/EIS responds to congressional designation of the Trail and the requirements of the National Trails System Act of 1968 (NTSA), as amended. The document identifies issues, evaluates alternative strategies, and proposes a comprehensive management and use plan for the Trail.

BACKGROUND

The Trail commemorates the route taken by marchers during the March 21 through March 25, 1965, Voting Rights March. The march between Selma, Alabama and the State capitol in Montgomery was a watershed event in the Modern Civil Rights Movement, eventually leading to passage of the 1965 Voting Rights Act and the transformation of the political landscape in the American South and the nation as a whole.

The 54-mile trail begins at the Brown Chapel AME Church in Selma, Alabama and follows the route of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March, which traveled through Lowndes County along US Highway 80 to Montgomery, culminating at the State capitol.

In August 1995, the Governor of Alabama designated US Highway 80 between Selma and Montgomery as a Scenic Byway. In January 1996, the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) recommended that the Federal Highway Administration (FHA)

grant All American Road status to US Highway 80. The All American Road is the highest designation a road can receive under the Federal Highway Administration's National Scenic Byways Program.

In November 1996, Congress, acting under the NTSA, created the Trail along US Highway 80. The NTSA is intended to promote the preservation of scenic and historic travel routes and to “encourage and assist volunteer citizen involvement in the planning, development, maintenance, and management, where appropriate, of trails (Sec. 2.c).” The NHT designation is based on the historic significance of the 1965 Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March.

The CMP/EIS sets management objectives and priorities for administration, resource protection, interpretation and the visitor experience of the Trail. The plan further defines roles and responsibilities for the agencies, organizations, and local interests that will serve as partners with the NPS to carry out those objectives.

DECISION (Selected Action)

The NPS will implement Alternative C, the preferred alternative, as described in the final document issued in June 2005. Alternative C stresses the broadest range of interpretive themes relating to the events of March 1965. The alternative interprets the evolution of citizenship rights in the United States and places the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March in the broadest context of the Modern Civil Rights Movement and American democracy. It aims to help visitors understand that the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March was not an isolated event, but an integral part of the evolving role of African-Americans in American democracy.

Alternative C provides the most extensive plan for resource preservation, protection, and commemoration. Among its priorities is the coordinated protection of historically intact viewsheds along US Highway 80, the most extensive certification of commemorative sites and streetscapes, design proposals for new park spaces, and marked walking and biking trails.

The vast majority of both the public and Trail partners selected Alternative C as the preferred alternative. The Trail’s Citizens Advisory Council, whose members were appointed by the Secretary of the Interior, also officially endorsed Alternative C as the preferred alternative.

OTHER ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED

The CMP/EIS evaluates three other management alternatives for the Trail--Alternative A, Alternative B, and a No Action Alternative. Each alternative describes a different way of commemorating, interpreting, and preserving resources associated with the trail. In general, alternatives A, B, and C represent a progression from educating visitors about

the march itself to a more intensive interpretation of the regional and national struggle for the right to vote and its context within the broader Civil Rights Movement.

Alternative A focuses on the story of the voting rights march as defined by events that occurred between March 7 and March 25, 1965, in Dallas, Lowndes, and Montgomery counties, Alabama. Trail-related interpretation and educational opportunities would emphasize a limited range of interpretive themes related directly to local march activities.

Alternative B builds on the story of Alternative A, providing information on the broader efforts to gain voting rights for African Americans as events unfolded in Dallas, Lowndes, and Montgomery counties. Trail-related interpretation and educational opportunities would emphasize a wider range of interpretive themes than Alternative A, stressing early grass roots organizing, the march, and the aftermath of the march in the surrounding counties.

The No Action Alternative would continue current management activities and trends. No major changes in visitor programs, resource management or facility development would occur. This alternative would involve the minimal actions required to preserve and maintain the cultural and natural resources associated with the march and its related sites.

BASIS FOR DECISION

Alternative C offers the broadest level of resources protection, interpretation, visitor services, and the optimum opportunity for high quality visitor experiences. The alternative includes the stories of Alternatives A and B, but adds a national focus by interpreting the progression of citizenship rights in the United States.

Alternative C also outlines a strategy for establishing interpretive centers in Selma, Montgomery, and Lowndes County, and development of corresponding interpretive programs at those locations. Visitors would have access to a full range of recreational and interpretive activities, such as driving, walking, biking, guided tours, and interaction with audiovisual materials. The alternative also provides guidance for the coordinated protection of historically intact viewsheds along US Highway 80. Substantial portions of the highway's viewsheds appear much as they did 40 years ago. Preservation and protection of the viewsheds would greatly enhance the sense of "stepping back in time" to experience the setting of the Voting Rights March as it appeared in 1965.

The CMP/EIS is a programmatic statement. The proposed action and alternatives each consist of a basic management framework for future decision making. Consequently, the statement presents an overview of potential impacts relating to the proposed program for each alternative. In the future, implementation of specific actions included in the approved final plan would require the preparation of more detailed environmental assessments. This ROD is the last necessary action under National Environmental Policy

Act (NEPA) regulations and completes the comprehensive management planning process for the National Historic Trail.

ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE ALTERNATIVE

The environmentally preferable alternative is defined as “the alternative that will promote the national environmental policy as expressed in Section 101 of NEPA. Ordinarily, this means the alternative that causes the least damage to the biological and physical environment; it also means the alternative which best protects, preserves, and enhances historic, cultural, and natural resources” (Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning Council on Environmental Quality’s National Environmental Policy Act Regulations, 1981).

Based on the national environmental policy goals, the environmentally preferable alternative is Alternative C, which is the selected action. Alternative C would go the furthest of all the alternatives in protecting, preserving, and enhancing historic, cultural, and natural resources. Alternative C stresses the broadest range of interpretive themes relating to the events of March 1965. The alternative interprets the evolution of citizenship rights in the United States and places the Selma to Montgomery Voting Rights March in the broadest context of the Modern Civil Rights Movement and American democracy.

The NPS would recognize the broadest range of primary, secondary and commemorative sites and route segments related to the story of the march. Managing partners participating in the certification process would develop resource protection plans, thus maintaining consistency of stewardship and preservation among individual Trail components. Alternative C would also rehabilitate an existing historic structure in Selma and restore and re-use portions of the historic City of St. Jude site in Montgomery. The NPS would provide technical assistance to preserve the distinguishing architectural features of the buildings. In addition to these specific actions, the NPS would coordinate an effort among managing partners to protect existing historic resources.

The ALDOT and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) would work with the NPS to inventory the significant, historically intact landscapes along US Highway 80 and seek funding for acquisition and preservation. Private entities would retain control of most of the land adjacent to the existing Trail right-of-way, which exposes the Trail to the risk of inappropriate commercial or industrial development. The NPS, however, would collaborate with managing partners to protect the landscape along the Trail and actively set priorities for the acquisition of key viewsheds.

Alternative C would enhance visitor experiences by offering the most comprehensive range of educational and recreational activities. Visitors could access a fully managed experience along the entire Trail with interpretive materials, information, and NPS staff available in Selma, Lowndes County and Montgomery. Travelers could also use

designated pedestrian and biking routes to explore additional recreational and cultural opportunities near the Trail corridor.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

From the beginning of the planning effort for the CMP/EIS, particular attention was paid to the need to establish strong working relationships with partners from Federal, state, and local agencies, the Trail associations, and private landowners. Consultation actually dates back over 10 years when the NPS began consultation and coordination with governmental agencies and private organizations during its 1993 National Trail Study.

The NPS consulted with various stakeholders during preparation of the preliminary alternatives summary in 1999, including the National Historic Trail Friends Groups in Selma, Lowndes County, and Montgomery, the National Historic Trail Citizens Advisory Council, FWA, ALDOT, and the Alabama Historical Commission.

The ALDOT conducted extensive public participation activities as part of the 1999 Master Plan, which corresponded closely with development of this CMP/EIS. Those activities included public meetings and workshops in each of the three counties, as well as personal interviews with organizers and march participants.

The CMP/EIS alternatives were presented to the public, partners, and other stakeholders during a series of meetings in 2002 and 2003. Numerous consultation meetings were also held with the SHPO, ALDOT, and officials from Selma, Montgomery, and Lowndes County. The draft document was reviewed by WASO during winter 2004 and the public review draft was released during summer 2004. Alternative C continued to have widespread support following these meetings and review periods.

FINDINGS ON IMPAIRMENT OF NPS RESOURCES AND VALUES

The NPS has determined that implementation of Alternative C of the CMP/EIS will not constitute impairment to the resources and values of the Trail. This conclusion is based on an analysis of the environmental impacts, the public comments received, and the professional judgment of the decision-maker guided by the direction in *National Park Service Management Policies (2001)*. Although the proposed action could have some adverse impacts, in all cases these would be the result of actions taken to enhance the visitor experience and to preserve resources and values associated with the Trail and the Voting Rights March. Overall, the selected action results in major benefits to the Trail's resources and values and provides enhanced opportunities for public use and enjoyment.

In determining whether impairment may occur, park managers consider the duration, severity, and magnitude of the impact; the resources and values affected; and direct, indirect, and cumulative effects of the action. According to NPS policy, "An impact would be more likely to constitute an impairment to the extent that it affects a resource or

value whose conservation is: a) Necessary to fulfill specific purposes identified in the establishing legislation or proclamation of the park; b) Key to the natural or cultural integrity of the park or to opportunities for enjoyment of the park; or c) Identified as a goal in the park's general management plan or other relevant NPS planning documents.” (Director's Order 55)

In conclusion, the NPS has determined that the implementation of Alternative C, the selected action, will not result in impairment of resources and values to the Trail.

Approved:

/s/ Patricia A. Hooks August 30, 2005
Regional Director Date